

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
December 15, 2004, 4:30 p.m. Council Chambers**

PRESENT

Ian Kohen
Cindy Felsten
Gil Palmer
Chrystal Pushor
Wes Roy
Barbara Stevens
Dick Underdahl-Peirce

ABSENT

Jay Myers
Marie Schroeder
Jason Staley
Madhu Vedak

STAFF PRESENT:

Director Arlette Tinsley, Deputy Director Lorraine Smith, Secretary Lula Young
Visitors present: Warren Baumgart

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Commissioner Stevens moved to accept the minutes of the regular full commission meeting of October 27, 2004. Commissioner Kohen seconded. Motion passed.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Commissioner Felsten reported there no transactions during the months of November or December. The current balance remains at \$3,854.82.

CHAIRPERSON'S STATEMENT:

Chairperson Palmer commented on the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation's BCSC's) in-service professional development session he recently attended. He stated that over-all, the session was a good first step by BCSC administration. In-service attendee's agreed that the film by futurist Joel Barker discussing paradigm shifting was a good tool in illustrating the value of a diverse society against the negatives inherent in a homogeneous society.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Commissioners received a copy of the Executive Summary and 2004 Annual Report as it was submitted to the Mayor. The report highlights staff accomplishments which included exceeding the Commission's processing case goal and some collaborative efforts in 2004.

Director Tinsley provided an overview of the pending caseload, with the observation that for two years in a row, no sexual harassment complaints have been received. The Commission also received more complaints alleging housing discrimination than complaints alleging employment discrimination in 2004. Local numbers are comparable to complaints filed nationwide indicating a slight increase in religion complaints.

Director Tinsley provided a summary of case law regarding religious accommodations in the workplace. Employees have the right to request a clean and available room for prayer or meditation. Employers are not required to provide separate rooms for each religion. Case law supports the employee's right to reasonable accommodation for a 'sincerely held belief' (religious accommodation), except if the accommodation is an "undue burden" for the employer.

FOR DISCUSSION – 2005 Goals & Objectives:

Commissioners reviewed the 2005 Goals and Objectives as submitted by Director Tinsley in the Executive Summary and Annual Report. **Commissioner Stevens moved to adopt the 2005 Goals and Objectives, Commissioner Underdahl-Peirce seconded. Motion carried.**

HERITAGE FUND/WELCOMING COMMUNITIES:

Chairperson Palmer welcomed community guest, Warren Baumgart, Executive Director of the Columbus Area Arts Council.

Director Tinsley provided an overview of the recent focus group surveys facilitated by the Heritage Fund's Welcoming Communities Initiative. Heritage Fund board members supported the results of the focus group data. As demonstrated by charted data, the surveys revealed that for the people who are part of the majority population, Columbus is a very welcoming place. Evaluations submitted by minority population such as, black, international and gay professionals, show that Columbus can appear at times unwelcoming. One focus group participant used the word "unsafe." The Heritage Fund will publish the Focus group survey results on their website and have a presentation to the community. All focus group participants will be invited to attend the public presentation. Commissioner Stevens commented on the Heritage Fund's plan to continue to develop its board so it is inclusive of the community.

Mr. Baumgart acknowledged the organization's commitment to what could be accomplished. He is encouraged and has a sense that something constructive will come out of the focus group sessions.

MAYOR'S CULTURAL AWARENESS COMMITTEE:

Commissioner Roy announced that the Cultural Awareness Committee met December 9th. The first 'Neighbor Talks' is scheduled for February 3rd, 2005, in the Meeting Hall beginning at 7 p.m. with an introduction by Mayor Armstrong. Commissioner Roy reported his assignment to the Media Relations Task Group. Commissioner Roy answered questions from commissioners, advised that the committee is planning for a minimum of 50 participants. The session will begin in a table talk setting with a small group breakout session.

LIAISON UPDATES - GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCE:

Commissioner Felsten reported on Sherry Stark's presentation to the Gay/Straight Alliance. Commissioner Felsten shared the frustration the Gay community voiced about their treatment locally, including 'letters to the editors', and other institutions with regard to their treatment of gays.

Chairperson Palmer tabled discussion of 2004-2005 Essay & Art Contest, Annual Dinner Speaker and the Legal update to the January 2005 meeting.

Director Tinsley advised a press release requesting Laws Award nominations will be submitted in January.

Commissioner Underdahl-Peirce moved to accept the proposed 2005 Commission meeting dates as submitted, Commissioner Stevens seconded. Motion carried.

ADJOURN:

Commissioner Stevens moved to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Felsten seconded. Meeting adjourned.